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Article

“Listen to What We Have to Say”: Children and Young People’s Perspectives on Urban Regeneration

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Abstract

There is an important body of research that explores the contested understandings of urban regeneration programmes in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. While poor housing and living conditions must be tackled, regeneration programmes have been criticised for their destructive and displacement impacts on communities, their lack of public consultation and their reinforcement of the stigmatization of poor areas that draws “attention away from the structural and institutional failures that produce and reproduce poverty” and inequality (Hancock & Mooney, 2013, p. 59). However, much of the literature focuses on the understandings and perspectives of adult residents in regeneration areas. This article explores the views of young residents from ages 6 to 19 in Knocknaheeny, one of the largest social housing estates in Cork City in the South of Ireland, which is undergoing a regeneration programme. Through a series of creative methods, the research reveals the distinctive analysis these children and young people have on their community, the change it is undergoing, issues of poverty, stigma and exclusion, and their lack of involvement in the decision-making process. Taken together, these children and young people generate an analysis that is strikingly reminiscent of Wacquant’s (2008) concept of ‘territorial stigma.’ They clearly cite how the misrecognition and devaluation of their neighbourhood and community shifts responsibility for decline away from the institutional failings of the local authority and state, back toward the people who live there.

Keywords

children; consultation; Cork; creativity in research; stigma; urban regeneration; youth

Issue

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1. Introduction

Many cities in advanced capitalist economies have experienced a process of economic transformation which has seen the loss of long-established sources of employment such as heavy industry and manufacturing with consequent impacts on working class communities and neighborhoods which were historically dependent on such sectors for employment and regular incomes (Drudy &

Punch, 2000). In many instances such communities are not in a position to access the new employment opportunities which have replaced those which have been lost and often face into long term unemployment, reliance on poorly paid and precarious jobs compared to what went before, and face the increased risk of poverty and marginalization (Loftman & Nevin, 1995; Moore, 2008).

Such neighbourhoods are frequently monotonurial and dominated by social housing built by local authori-

ties or approved housing bodies which is specifically targeted at low income households and was built apart from private tenures thereby creating patterns of spatial segregation. Therefore, the impacts of decline are often evident spatially as particular neighbourhoods bear the brunt of unemployment and loss of economic viability (Douceta & Duignan, 2012). Economic and spatial marginalization can be accompanied by disinvestment by public bodies (who themselves experience a revenue crisis due to falling taxation revenues) and private enterprise who may see diminishing scope for profitable economic activity and depart such neighbourhoods thus resulting in further loss of services. Combining these factors can result in a more general loss of quality of life and liveability for residents and at household level this can trigger a 'churn' as residents who can leave do so, often to be replaced by more disadvantaged newcomer households (Norris, 2013).

Wacquant (1996, 2008) has described this as leading to a situation of advanced marginality being experienced by such neighbourhoods and he identifies a number of features which encapsulate the experiences of these neighbourhoods and communities. These include "flexible, unstable patterns of wage labour and the production of insecurity and social disintegration; the functional disconnection from macro-economic trends" (Wacquant, 2008, pp. 236–237), which according to Hancock and Mooney (2013, p. 52) leads to "the most marginal groups remaining untouched in periods of economic growth and life chances remaining persistently depressed." Another feature highlighted by Wacquant (1996, 2008) is 'territorial stigmatization' whereby the concentration of marginal groups in particular locations leads to such places being regarded as dangerous places by those who reside within and outside them. According to Wacquant (1996, p. 129), one of the tasks of "research on advanced marginality will be to establish how each of these variables or processes presents itself differently in different countries and/or types of urban environment."

While many of the problems faced by marginalized neighbourhoods are macro in nature and related to the structural changes in the capitalist economy, local interventions are often proposed as a remedy. One of the remedies proposed for disadvantaged areas is the concept of regeneration which Robert and Sykes have defined as:

A comprehensive and integrated vision and action which leads to the resolution of urban problems and which seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area that has been subject to change. (Roberts & Sykes, 2000, p. 18)

Though regeneration is now an established strategy for addressing the problems experienced by disadvantaged areas it is not uncontested as a theory and practice and can be challenged at a number of levels. Firstly,

it has clear limitations in terms of capacity to address what are in essence the symptoms of the structural failures of advanced capitalism as mentioned earlier. It may frame problems which are structural in nature as emanating from 'deficits' in infrastructure, education, households and neighbourhoods. A meritocratic rather than redistributive ideology underlies many regeneration interventions which focuses on mitigating these deficits (Imbroscio, 2016) so that residents can compete more effectively for scarce resources in the wider economy.

Regeneration may not solve problems but displace them and Imbroscio (2016) has also criticised regeneration programmes for their destructive and displacement impacts on communities and the compounding of stigma and marginalization of affected neighbourhoods. While we have argued elsewhere that poor housing and living environments must be tackled (Byrne, O'Connell, & O'Sullivan, 2020), others have expressed concerns that regeneration can serve to legitimate existing socio-economic conditions. For example, according to Hancock and Mooney (2013, p. 59) regeneration can work to:

Divert attention away from the structural and institutional failures that produce and reproduce poverty, as well as neglecting any sense that the workings of the capitalist economy, whether in a period of crisis or not, also create the conditions for emerging social problems as well as social and economic inequality.

Bissett (2009) has analysed the power differentials in the relationship between the State which is generally the sponsor of regeneration and local communities who are the subject of it. Whose opinions are sought and whose voices are heard when regeneration programmes are being devised and implemented must also be considered. While regeneration may be informed to some degree by resident opinions, the degree to which this is fulfilled in a meaningful and sustained manner is questionable and good intentions are frequently not followed through as the official agenda dominates over community concerns (Hearne, 2013; Taylor, 1995). Furthermore, when consultation with communities does occur it may be tokenistic, i.e., informing residents of what will happen rather than asking them what should happen, be limited and narrow in scope, and make assumptions about which voices are representative of the community. Established voices such as community representatives, development workers and local politicians tend to dominate as these are seen to represent 'the community.'

The concept of 'territorial stigma' (Wacquant, 2008) can explicate how these good intentions become subdued over time. Recent research in the UK highlights the operationalizing of stigma where certain social housing estates, estates that would otherwise be prime real-estate sites, become targets for big business and gentrification programmes (Paton, 2018; Slater, 2018). Slater argues that:

Symbolic defamation provides the groundwork and ideological justification for a thorough class transformation of urban space, usually involving housing demolition, dispersal of residents, land clearance, and then the construction of housing and services aimed at a more affluent class of resident. (Slater, 2018, pp. 891–892)

Slater (2018) goes on to highlight ample evidence that this is done quite purposefully. While this analysis is reminiscent of Bissett's critique of public–private partnerships of a type proposed for St. Michael's Estate (Bissett, 2009) in Dublin, this is clearly not the case in Knocknaheeny.

Knocknaheeny is a large social housing estate in Cork City, in the South of Ireland. As with many other working class neighbourhoods in the city, the estate, which was originally constructed during the 1970s, has seen the loss of employment as a result of the collapse of traditional industries such as car and tyre manufacturing and ship building from the 1980s onwards. It fulfils many of Wacquant's indicators of advanced marginality and is one of the most deprived areas of the city with high concentrations of socio-economic disadvantage. According to the census survey of 2016, this includes an unemployment rate that continues to be more than double that of the city (falling from 23.8% in 2011 to 18.2% in 2016), high levels of lone parent families (53% of families with children are headed by lone parents, mainly mothers), low levels of education (with 28% of the population having no formal education or completing primary level education only), and deteriorating housing quality. Since 2012, the estate has been undergoing a major regeneration and refurbishment programme led by the local council involving a number of strands which include the knocking and reconstruction of housing stock, environmental and public space redesign, and social, economic and community development programmes (Housing Agency, 2011). The Knocknaheeny regeneration programme seeks to replace the existing social housing stock with a much improved, higher quality social housing stock. While there has been displacement, existing residents are offered an opportunity to return to the estate once the new homes are rebuilt.

However, Knocknaheeny and other similar estates throughout Ireland have also been subject to discursive labelling, both in the media and in localised cultural discourses (McNamara, Muldoon, Stevenson, & Slattery, 2011). These same processes of stigmatization can help account for the subduing of good intentions and the abandonment of serious plans for deep and sustained partnership and consultation with communities subject to regeneration. As Slater argues, territorial stigma results in policy makers and regeneration processes underestimating the capacities of the community, falling into the trap of re-pathologizing that community:

This derogatory designator, signifying social housing estates that supposedly create poverty, family

breakdown, worklessness, welfare dependency, antisocial behaviour and personal irresponsibility, has become the symbolic frame justifying current policies towards social housing that have resulted in considerable social suffering and intensified dislocation. (Slater, 2018, p. 877)

There is also the question of unheard voices, especially those of children whose views are seldom elicited or considered (Speak, 2000). This reflects a more generalized practice in urban planning that consultations between local authorities and communities is an adult space and that they adequately represent the views of everybody (Goodwin & Young, 2013). The marginal position of young people in terms of the political process has meant that it is only very recently that children have emerged as a focus of urban regeneration programs. Fitzpatrick, Hastings, and Kintrea (2000) suggest three main reasons for this including acknowledgement of the particular disadvantages faced by young people in deprived neighbourhoods, perceptions that they are the source of problems in their areas, and a recognition of the need to increase community participation opportunities for them. It is also argued that children's participation leads to better decisions for them, provides insights for policy making, and makes adult decision-makers more accountable (Lundy & Stalford, 2013). However, UNICEF (2012) has expressed concern that children and young people remain absent from community consultations despite the impact public policies and interventions have on their lives and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) emphasises the right of children to be heard (United Nations, 1989). From a methodological point of view a central concern is finding the appropriate means to ascertain the views of the children and the remainder of this article outlines a case study of a regeneration area.

2. Methods

The article presents the findings of research undertaken in Knocknaheeny in 2013. There is a particularly large young population of children in the estate with 32% of the population under 19 according to the census survey of 2016, many of whom come from single-parent families with high levels of dependence on social welfare transfer payments and supports. The purpose was to contribute to the development of national consultative processes by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and to share the findings with the local council responsible for the regeneration programme.

The research methodology was informed by Lundy and McEvoy's (2011) recommendations that children's participation in research should be voluntary and safe, that research should be creative and child-centred, that children's views should be listened to and acted upon, and feedback given and children engaged in research outcomes. In line with these criteria and drawing from the work of other child-centred research (Fargas-Malet,

McSherry, Larkin, & Robinson, 2010; Greene & Hill, 2005; Veale, 2005), the project developed a range of qualitative, participatory and creative research methods. The research centred on an activity developed by the researchers themselves called 'the Wheel.' Its purpose was to guide ten focus groups held with 78 children and youth, ranging in age from 6 to 19 years. 'The Wheel' created an open-ended but systematic process of data gathering, like the studies of Goodwin and Young (2013) and Smith and Kotsanas (2014) with Australian children in urban areas. It involved a circle divided into four quadrants, each denominated as such: (1) What I like about my area; (2) What I don't like about my area; (3) What I'd like to change about my area; and (4) How I should have a say. Participants were encouraged to write whatever they liked on 'the Wheel,' including drawing and art. 'The Wheel' is described in more detail in O'Sullivan, O'Connell, and Byrne (2017). While focus groups have some limitations—for example, some views may not be stated or some participants may be more dominant—there are also particular advantages to using focus groups with children, mainly that they create a safe and encouraging space and mirror the group settings that children are familiar with in their everyday lives (Hennessy & Heary, 2005).

The research also incorporated a rap project involving nine of the children (aged 11–16) who wrote and recorded a rap song in a temporary recording studio in the estate run by a well-known local rap producer, analysed in detail in Byrne et al. (2020). The research also involved a Photovoice project with 18 young people (aged 15–16) in a local school who took photographs of their area following the themes of 'the Wheel,' and discussed and selected the photographs most important to them in a follow-up session. A number of observers have asserted that creative methods facilitate children and young people to express their experiences and opinions more easily than in focus group settings alone (Curtis, Roberts, Copperman, Downie, & Liabo, 2004; Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schiller, 2005).

Of the 78 children and young people, 48 were male and 30 were female. Thirteen of the participants were aged 6–8 years, 29 aged 9–13 years, 26 aged 14–17 years and 10 aged 18–19 years. The researchers recruited children and young people from local primary and secondary schools, but in an effort to ensure a broad representation also accessed more 'difficult to reach' young people. These were drawn from a combination of early school leaving initiatives, training workshops and youth projects and were recognised by youth workers as being very marginalized within their area and the city more widely. Project workers and teachers attended the focus groups due to their familiarity with and support for the children and young people. This strategy is recommended by Curtis et al. (2004, p. 171) who state: "As well as offering encouragement and support to the young people, we found staff able to spot where their difficulties with the research process might lie."

Before the research began, informed consent was sought from the children and young people and their parents, and permission to record proceedings was also secured at the beginning of each focus group. Ethical approval was granted by the university research ethics committee and the researchers were vetted under national police vetting procedures prior to beginning the research to ensure child protection. To ensure anonymity of the young people, no names have been used in this research.

The analysis was based on thematic coding by age cohort, whereby what was important to each group was identified and categorized. The findings include illustrative quotes, pictures and photographs and an analysis of the raps, the full lyrics of which are included in the Supplementary Material.

3. Findings

The articulation of the experience of advanced marginality is evident in the opinions of the young people. The research reveals the distinctive analysis these children and young people have on their community and are presented under thematic headings and subsections related to advanced marginality. Additional themes of environmental decline and exclusion from decision-making that were significant to all the children and young people also emerged.

3.1. Stigmatization

The issue of stigma and experiences of stigmatization was a significant theme for the older teenagers, namely 17–19 year olds. They recognize that their area has been subject to 'discourses of vilification' particularly around danger and disorder (Wacquant, 1996, p. 125). However, they think that Knocknaheeny has become a safer place in the past few years and that it doesn't deserve its continued reputation. One boy said that "Knocknaheeny does have a bad name, but a lot of that was over Joyriding, and a lot of that was over eight years ago. It has changed big time since then" (Boy 1).

Yet the area's negative reputation affects them in daily life, for example:

Boy 1: Like when you used to play soccer, like if we play against some team, you'd have all lads calling you Knacker and that.

Boy 2: Yea. That's cause we are from Knocknaheeny. Scumbag and that.

The ascription of the term 'scumbag' to all from Knocknaheeny is deeply felt especially given their pride in the area. This older group takes a nuanced view of the area and acknowledge that while some may cause trouble to tarnish everyone with the same bad name is highly problematic in their view.

Facilitator: And do you feel proud about being from Knocknaheeny?

Boy 1: Yea.

Girl 1: Yea....Because you know the way people say scumbags and all that, Knocknaheeny like?

Boy 2: So, f**k them.

Girl 1: There are scumbags out there, but we are not scumbags. Like do you know what I mean? So we are getting a bad name for what those people are doing.

Deal with It, a rap song by six 14–16-year-olds, also tackles this on-going issue of stigma and estate reputation. Immediately, in the first verse, the rap asks the listener: ‘What do you see when you look at me, a young teen or a Feen from Knocknaheeny?’ In the recorded version the rapper exaggerates the Northside Cork accent to represent the stigma of being low status, that he recognises is attributed to him and his community by the rest of the city/society. Addressing this stigma, the rap argues that people don’t truly know them: ‘Our place it’s known as a disgrace. People haven’t took the time to see our real face.’

The rap also offers a critique of regeneration by linking the themes of neighbourhood stigma and the policy of regeneration when two of the girls rap: ‘We know Knocka has a bad reputation, but there is no need for a mass evacuation.’ These young people see the stigmatization of their neighborhoods as a justification for regeneration’s current form, but argue that this underestimates how much the local resident’s value their community as a positive that needs to be protected, rather than destroyed. Slater (2018, p. 877) identifies how territorial stigma can become an instrument of urban politics:

The ‘sink estate,’ it is argued, is the semantic battering ram in the ideological assault on social housing, deflecting attention away from social housing not only as urgent necessity during a serious crisis of affordability, but as incubator of community, solidarity, shelter and home.

3.2. Employment Insecurity

Many of the young people from age 15 are concerned about the lack of employment opportunities available to them. They anticipate difficulties in securing work locally which impacts on their sense of the future and of remaining in the area as described in the extract of the focus group of young people aged 15–16:

Facilitator: And you were saying you would like to stay in the area, that you’d like to be able to work and that.

Boy 1: If I got work like, it is hard to say. I wouldn’t mind staying here.

Facilitator: And what do you think about prospects for employment up here?

Boy 1: Work is hard to get.

The disconnection of the area from macro-economic trends evident in long-term unemployment is highlighted when the young people aged 17–19 express worry about their parents’ expulsion from the labour market.

Girl 1: My Mam doesn’t work at all. Your Mam doesn’t work either.

Girl 2: Sure, you couldn’t even get a f***** job up here.

Girl 1: None of them have jobs.

Girl 2: Yea, no jobs.

Girl 1: Not enough jobs.

For the rapper in *Deal with It* this sense of exclusion from the economy leads them to propose that ‘livin’ up here you have to make opportunities.’ However, the males in the group of 17–19 year olds also see potential in the prospect of jobs associated with the regeneration programme, which they suggest should be connected to the community:

Boy 1: They are developing Knocknaheeny, so Knocknaheeny people should build it.

Boy 2: And then get a trade out of it. A carpenter.

Boy 1: Plasterer, Electrician...

Boy 2: Or a handyman like.

The extent of unemployment in the area is related to the issue of drugs according to this oldest group. They argue that those who are excluded from paid employment must resort to dealing, the shadow economy/underground commerce that Wacquant, among others, refers to. In their view, unemployment is also a factor in drug addiction:

Boy 2: There are fellas that are drug-dealers. That’s what they have to live like. Because there are no jobs out there, everyone has to go dealing like.

Facilitator: Do you think the jobs issue is a big issue up here?

Boy 2: That’s the reason people take drugs as well like.

Facilitator: Ok.

Boy 1: There is one fella, sitting at home with nothing to do we'll say, I'm on my own so I'd be smoking gear, like that's what happens.

Facilitator: Do you think jobs would eliminate a lot of the problems in the area?

Boy 1: If you are working nine to five, you don't have time to be thinking, and then taking drugs and that.

3.3. Personal and Community Safety: Territorial Alienation

The sense of continuity between economic exclusion and territorial alienation was evident in the discussion of drugs, drug dealing, safety and anti-social behaviour. Younger children, such as those age 6–8, were concerned for their safety because of public fighting and drunkenness and the noise and disruption caused by parties and by motorbikes:

Girl 2: There are people having a party and they are right next to my bedroom....Imagine, my Mam was sleeping in my bed with me and the baby was screaming and my Mam and Da sleep next to where the dog is barking. Everyone is screaming when they walk around, they wake my baby brother.

For 9–13-year-olds, their sense of personal safety centred on intimidation. One boy said: 'We were walking on the road and a fella came up to me, grabbed me by the shirt, started mocking me, tried to fight me and everything.' The same issues arose in a focus group of 15–16-year-olds who have also had direct experience of these matters, which shape their everyday realities in the area and make them feel vulnerable:

Girl 1: Alcoholics drinking like.

Facilitator: Drinking on the street is it?

Girl 1: It's people lying on the ground....Fights.

Girl 2: And fires.

Girl 3: Junkies, seriously junkies.

Facilitator: And is that getting worse, do you think?

Several voices: yea...

Girl 1: Way worse.

Facilitator: Why?

Girl 1: Because there are always fights and everything.

Part of the problem in their view emanates from services such as drug treatment and rehabilitation which releases people back into the community without appropriate follow-up supports:

Girl 2: My brother came home and he was saying that a fella was trying to sell him tablets.

Facilitator: Really? And why do you think the drugs problem is getting worse?

Girl 1: There are too many young fellas coming out of rehab at the same time and coming back together....And the last time two fellas in a car tried to drag my brother into the car.

Drinking and drugs impacts on their access to local amenities and sports and recreational facilities, in particular the basketball court and soccer pitch. This captures Wacquant's (1996, p. 126) concept of the 'perilous battlefield' where a contest is waged between different elements in the community, and children, young people and other marginalized groups are alienated from their own place:

Facilitator: You don't like the basketball court?

Boy 1: It's pointless like. There are all gangs up there. And all they are doing is smoking up there and taking drugs.

The two raps synthesise these issues around safety with *Deal with It* also highlighting the hazards associated with criminality and drugs: 'When we're playing soccer in the park and it's dark, And it's full of needles. Like getting bitten by a shark.' In *No More*, the rappers, aged 11 and 12, desire an end to drinking, fighting and drugs, three issues they see as being intertwined, and an end to criminality and antisocial behaviour: 'No more drinking, fighting and drugs No more kids growing up into thugs.' They recognize that their area is particularly marginalized, and they implicate how social problems are spatially concentrated with people living in other wealthier areas not subject to the same experiences, such as:

A junkie living with the rats in his gaff.

Always on drugs, always off his head

Spending everyday just lying in his bed.

I don't wanna live next door to that!

You'd never see junkies living by fat cats.

Despite the territorial alienation of the area, the young people were intent on challenging this. Verse 3 in *Deal with It* describes the joy of community life, evident of

a place 'suffused with shared meanings, emotions and practices' (Wacquant, 1996, p. 126) and they refuse to be defined by the alienation and marginality they experience. This was summed up by one rapper who stated: 'This is where I'm from I keep real with it. I'm Knocknaheeny born just deal with it.'

3.4. Environmental Decline

The issue of environmental degradation and decline in the area was reiterated by children and young people in every focus group and is a key matter in what children don't like and what they'd like to change about their area, ranging from derelict and boarded up houses to dumping of rubbish and deteriorating public realm. The children from group B in our research (6–8 years old) stated:

Boy2: Up the hill there, there are a few houses that are knocked.

Girl 1: There's bags of nappies up there and cans.

Facilitator: How do ye feel when ye see the bags of nappies?

Girl 2: Disgusting.

Girl 1: I feel I'm going to puke.

The poor quality of the environment negatively impacts on their use of local amenities, especially the park which was the most important amenity for the younger group

of children, some of whom aged 6–8 drew pictures of slides and swings on 'the Wheel' as shown in Figure 1. They identified broken glass and broken swings in the park is a big issue, which they think is due to anti-social behaviour—people being drunk and smashing bottles on the ground. One boy stated: 'The last time I sat down I cut my leg there on the glass.' Another girl, from group A in our research (6–8 years old), commented:

Girl 4: Swings are broken in the park.

Facilitator: Did they fall down, by accident?

Girl 4: No because two ladies pushed them all down. On purpose.

In the rap *No More*, the 11–12-year-olds also rap about environmental degradation and the significant impact it has on their social world, in particular the loss of a space for them to play because of glass on the basketball court:

Glass on the b-ball [basketball] court kid's fall.

It's for us to play in because we're small.

They are frustrated both with their own community and also with the lack of action from the local council about this issue despite the 'glossy' regeneration plans:

Glossy plans from the corporation man

Cans on the grounds no I'm not a big fan.



Figure 1. Child's drawing on 'the Wheel' reading 'Park swings are broke.'

Of all the trash outside on the grass.

The council just needs a kick up their ass.

This is similar to the older groups (17–19 years old) who are critical both of their community for their lack of care of the environment and the council for its inaction (as shown in Figure 2 from the Photovoice project):

Girl 1: They don't even clean it, it is a manky place.

Boy 1: People be throwing rubbish and naggins [bottles] in the ground and that.

In *Deal with It*, the rappers aren't afraid to state the truth as they see it:

The truth's harsh, like biting a lemon its bitter

But the truth is the place is destroyed in litter.

Trying to avoid broken bottles in front of you

Jumping around the place like it's Just Dance 2.

Evident in the opinions of these young people is a strong environmental consciousness and a critique of the diminution of public services, which is a reflection of the inconsistent treatment of this area by the local state which has tended to intervene only when matters reach a crisis point rather than sustaining services on an ongoing basis.

3.5. Exclusion from Decision-Making

The children and young people want to be heard but felt excluded, disempowered and alienated from the decision-making process in their community on regeneration. All of the children and young people, from the youngest to the oldest, have numerous ideas of how consultation could proceed with them, from regulator meetings, involvement in the design and planning, regular surveys, employment opportunities including working on the building, and regular distribution of information.

The 9–13 year-olds in particular are conscious of their rights as children in the here and now writing on 'the Wheel' that:

We should know what they are doing cos we live here/We should be heard/We are children and we have our own rights/Children should be allowed to say what happens in the area/Adults should listen to children.

When the researchers probed the origins of this awareness, it emerged that their teachers and youth workers had introduced them to the UNCRC and its relevance to their lives and experiences:

Facilitator: How would ye like to have ye're say?

Boy 1: We'd like to be heard like.

Boy 2: We should have our own say.

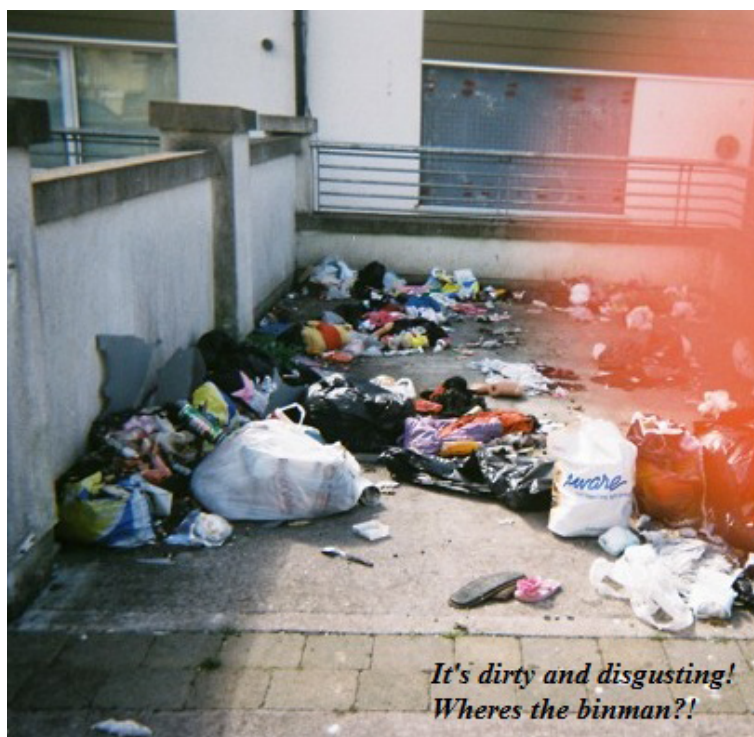


Figure 2. Photovoice: 'It's dirty and disgusting! Where's the binman?!'

Boy 1: The only people being heard on this project are adults like. We want to be heard as well.

Facilitator: Should ye tell the council, should ye get to meet the council?

Boy 1: Yea, we have our rights.

Girl 1: We are here too.

However, many were sceptical of how their input might be addressed. 15–16 year-olds are particularly cynical about the potential for participation, with one girl stating that the council ‘don’t care what we think about it.’ They wrote on ‘the Wheel’:

It might be a waste of time to talk to the council because if they wanted us involved in it, we would already be involved/Even if they don’t know we feel like this, they should have still considered the young people and they’re opinions.

The conversations in the focus group demonstrate this further:

Facilitator: Would you go if there was a meeting called? Or could you have a council in your school or something?

Several voices: Yea.

Girl 1: But wouldn’t that just be a waste of time, because if they wanted us involved they would have already involved us.

Girl 2: Yea, but they won’t take us serious anyway.

Facilitator: Why do you think they won’t take you seriously?

Girl 2: Because they would just look at us and think, ‘they are just kids.’

The raps also express their frustration with their exclusion from decision-making. In *No More*, the children rap ‘Stop ignoring me, listen to what I gotta say.’ While in *Deal with It*, the young people strongly critique the lack of consultation:

We know that there’s issues that need to be dealt with.

But your masterplan never asked us SHHHH!

IT doesn’t matter though about what we think.

Why’s it always the youth are the missing link?’

4. Conclusion

Neighbourhoods that experience economic decline are often subject to regeneration interventions in an effort to upgrade their infrastructure, amenities and economic sustainability. Within these programmes, provision is often made to consult with residents in the community. However, where this occurs, it is normally adults who are included. This article shows that children and young people are just as vulnerable to the effects of advanced marginality and have distinctive perspectives about their area and the challenges it faces. This analysis presented in this case study bears out the themes identified by Wacquant in relation to stigmatization, employment insecurity and territorial alienation as being of concern to children and young people and adds an additional theme identified by the children and young people in relation to environmental decline. Innovative research methods also show that the children and young people are not short of ideas on how they can get involved and have a say on matters that affect them and they are critical of their exclusion from the decision-making process.

While there are common concerns shared between the different age groups in this research, in particular that of environmental decline and how regeneration ignores the views of themselves and their families, the analysis has also revealed distinctive views. When they are younger, children are profoundly disturbed by safety issues, while the older age groups are also concerned with their employment prospects and the misrecognition, labelling and stigmatization of themselves and their community. The children and young people express deep levels of frustration from being underestimated and ignored as regeneration in action becomes overly paternalistic. When given an opportunity to speak, the children and young people create sophisticated analyses, identifying criminality, drug dealing, violence, etc. as huge problems, but they also recognise that regeneration, the city, society and state judges ‘them’ on the basis of this ‘minority of the worst’; overextending the label to the entire estate. They clearly say how can anything change ‘if you won’t listen.’ As argued above, the key social science literature highlights that neighbourhood decline is precipitated by exclusion, disempowerment and marginalisation, and regeneration programmes can feed into this same exclusion and disempowerment, and thereby not only fail to tackle deep rooted territorial stigmatization and marginality, but also reproduce it.

The analysis demonstrates that children and young people have their own valuable insights on regeneration that belies their stigmatization and underestimation, including critical perspectives and awareness of the impact of structural inequalities. The research highlights that the principles of children’s rights as articulated in the UNCRC, are as relevant to neighbourhood regeneration as any other setting and there is an obligation on authorities to ensure that the voices of children and young people are heard and that their opinions are valued. As a result

of the research the Irish Government's National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015, p. 40) states that 'local authorities will integrate local children and young people's participation into Housing Regeneration Programmes funded under the National Regeneration Programme.' Implementing such strategies through creative and participatory methods is essential to ensure a more inclusive approach to regeneration programmes so that children and young people can be heard and their opinions valued in similar regeneration projects now and in the future.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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